



What are you doing over the holiday break?

FACEBOOK POLL

See page 12.

Off Script

with ATA President Jason Schilling

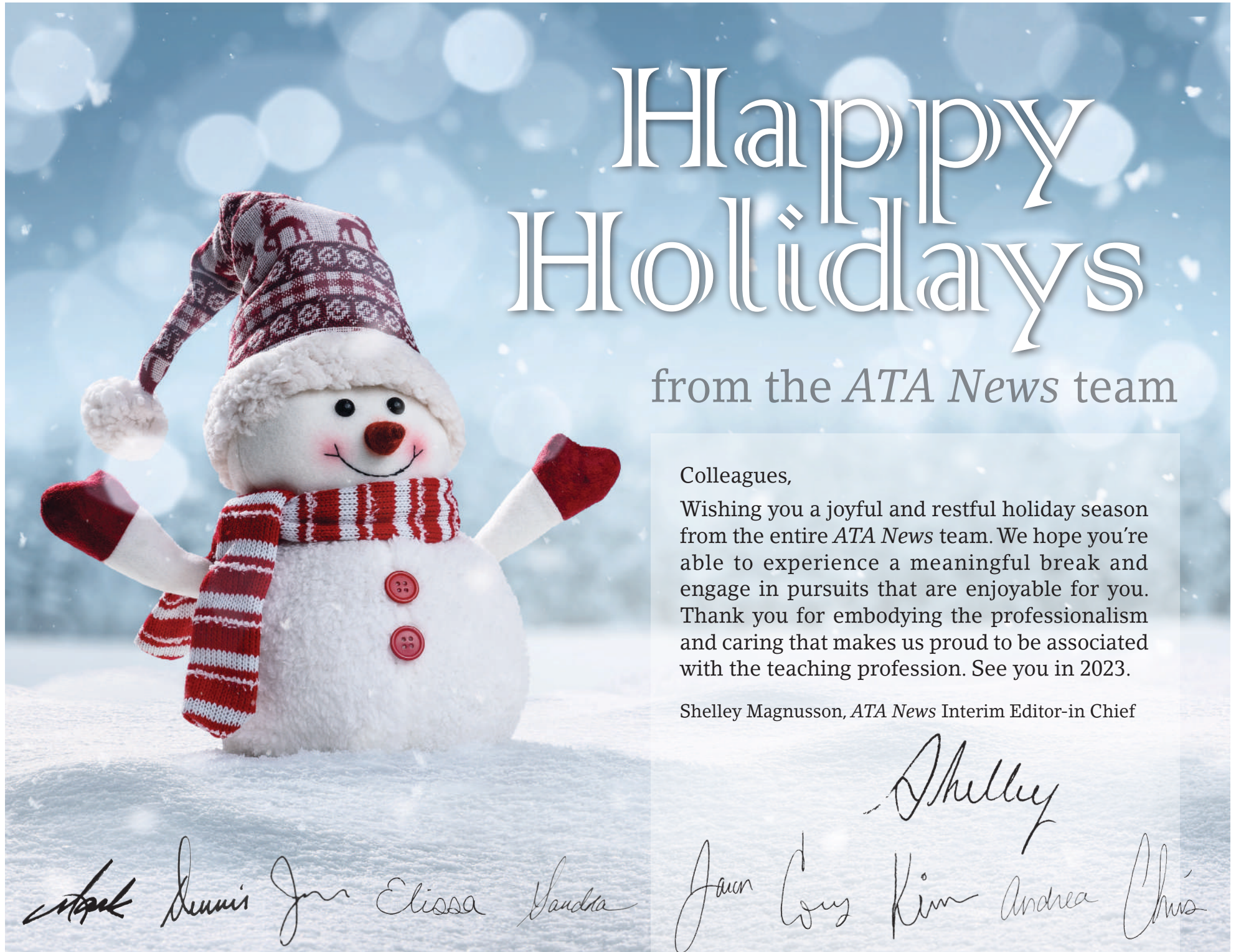


Enjoy your break. Page 5

# ATA NEWS

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## Happy Holidays

from the ATA News team

Colleagues,

Wishing you a joyful and restful holiday season from the entire ATA News team. We hope you're able to experience a meaningful break and engage in pursuits that are enjoyable for you. Thank you for embodying the professionalism and caring that makes us proud to be associated with the teaching profession. See you in 2023.

Shelley Magnusson, ATA News Interim Editor-in Chief

ISTOCK

### Breaking the cycle

Schools can play a role in addressing gender-based violence.

Read Shelley Magnusson's editorial on page 2.

### Women in leadership

Caregiving leaves slow teachers' progression into leadership, study finds.

See story on page 4.

### Too much holiday magic?

Tips for protecting your mental health during the holiday season.

See Viewpoints on page 3.

### Myth busted

Alberta's per-student spending ranks last in nation.

See story on page 7.

### Unrealistic expectations

Providing online and in-person learning not workable, says ATA president.

See story on page 5.



## Schools can play key role in violence prevention



### EDITORIAL

**Shelley Magnusson**  
ATA News Interim  
Editor-in-Chief

It has been said that the only thing that truly matters in life are your relationships with others. But what if your relationships with your family and friends are marred by violence? What if the people who are supposed to protect you, don't?

It is called many things ... domestic violence, domestic abuse, spousal abuse, intimate partner violence, battering or family violence. But whatever we decide to call it, the sad fact is that gender-based violence still exists. And it affects us all. It destroys families, weakens the fabric of our society, and takes a heavy toll on our communities and our economy.

Sadly, Alberta continues to lead the pack when it comes to domestic violence. Every hour of every day, a woman in Alberta will undergo some form of interpersonal violence from a

current or former partner. Each year, more than 40,000 arrests result from domestic violence; that's about 12 per cent of all violent crime in Canada. On any given day in Canada, more than 3,300 women along with their 3,000 children, are forced to sleep in emergency shelters to escape domestic violence. Every night, about 200 women are turned away because the shelters are full. And every six days in Canada, a woman is killed by her intimate partner.

Family violence creates a home environment where children live in constant fear. We know that boys who witness their mother's abuse are more likely to batter their female partners as adults than boys raised in nonviolent homes. Many girls who witness their mother's abuse grow up to believe that threats and violence are the norm in relationships, and perhaps the most chilling of statistics, 63 per cent of adolescent boys who commit homicide kill their mother's abuser. Children who witness violence suffer the same consequences as those who are directly abused. In other words, a child who witnesses spousal violence is experiencing a form of child abuse.

Studies unequivocally show that the precursors of domestic violence occur in childhood and adolescence. Children and youth learn relationship skills and social behaviours from their parents, other family members, their peers and their teachers. A high proportion of children who witness or experience violent relationships in childhood go on to perpetuate these patterns in adulthood. A growing body of research shows that domestic violence is often preceded by dating violence in adolescence, which is, in turn, often preceded by bullying and aggression in childhood and early adolescence. The lessons of power and bullying learned in the playground are often refined and intensified into domestic abuse as adults.

Today Canada recognizes the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence. This is an international campaign that begins on Nov. 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and goes until Dec. 10, Human Rights Day. This campaign started in 1991 to call out and speak up about gender-based violence, and to renew the world's commitment

to ending violence against women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.

Violence prevention programs in junior and senior high have had extremely positive results. According to the Canadian Women's Foundation

- eighty-three per cent of teens who participated in a violence prevention program said they learned how to recognize an abusive relationship and now know what to do if they or someone they know is being abused;
- sixty per cent used these new skills in their own dating relationships and credited the program with helping them to choose the right partner or leave an unhealthy relationship;
- sixty per cent of students in a high school with a violence prevention program noticed a decrease in violence and bullying in their school and in the broader community.

Domestic and gender violence are complex and intractable social problems that cannot be easily solved. But the cycle of violence can be broken. By helping our young people learn positive healthy relationship skills, we can help end the cycle. ■

## Seasonal concerts provide the ultimate test



### Q & A

**Dennis Theobald**  
ATA Executive  
Secretary

**Question:** A couple of issues ago you criticized excessive testing in Alberta's schools—what would you propose as an alternative?

**Answer:** Ahhhh, an excellent (and entirely made up) question that gives me an opportunity to retread an editorial I wrote years ago while meeting my editor's demand that I write something "nice and seasonal."

About this time of the year in elementary schools all across the province, music teachers are slowly losing their minds. The reason for this is the annual ritual that was (in less politically correct times) called the "Christmas concert" and is now often styled as the "winter celebration" or something similar. In recent years, the event has been on hiatus as we managed the pandemic, but despite the current challenges, it seems that this hallowed event is back on the calendar!

Ever since schools have existed in Alberta, the annual concert has been for many the biggest day of the year. Under the guidance of the music teacher, children are carefully selected

for various roles: the extroverts are assigned to be masters of ceremonies, the musically inclined are pushed to the front row of the risers in the hope that they will drown out their off-key classmates, and the "otherwise gifted" are relegated to playing the role of sheep, stars or the occasional tree. Long before inclusive education became the norm in the classroom, it was expected that the concert would involve every student—no excuses.

Of course, it isn't just the students and their classroom teachers who are

they trudge into a stifling gym. Phones and face masks are retrieved from pockets of parkas, the lights dim, the music teacher waves frantically from off stage, the sound system squawks and the concert begins.

Which brings me to my point. The only thing missing from this picture is a provincially standardized concert evaluation system with rubrics and, possibly, Fraser Institute rankings.

In fact, our failure to systematically evaluate and report on the quality of school concerts is surprising. From

“The only thing missing ... is a provincially standardized concert evaluation system with rubrics and ... Fraser Institute rankings.”

involved. Parents are pressed into building sets, finding props, making costumes and providing snacks. Custodians hang decorations. Clerical staff run off programs and school administrators adjust class schedules and supervise the trooping of classes down to the gym for rehearsal. But let's be frank—it's the music teacher who's running the show.

On the night of the concert, parents, grandparents and siblings arrive. After parking six blocks away from the school,

an evaluation perspective, the school concert is a target-rich environment—so many things just begging to be measured. For example, the ratio of children who bellow at the top of their lungs to those who stand in stage-struck silence; the number of consecutive years the Grade 3 students have performed some variant of *Jingle Bells* while strumming cardboard guitars; the percentage of sugar plum fairies who manage to dance in the correct/same direction. (I have a particular interest

in this last statistic. When my own left-handed daughter, Siobhan, was in Grade 2, she was one of a dozen sugar plum fairies and managed to execute the elaborately choreographed routine entirely in reverse. Mayhem ensued.)

Having determined the measures, we could collect the data and then integrate the results into the jurisdiction and provincial accountability pillar reports. The greens and reds of those reports would suddenly take on a festive flavour!

Before you dismiss this suggestion entirely, I'd like to point out that the state of public education is already being evaluated on this basis. As far as parents and communities are concerned, their impression of the school is far more likely to be influenced by the Christmas concert than by standardized test results. As far as these folks are concerned, if the concert is all right, then so is the school.

Which brings me back to those incredibly talented, stressed out and slightly crazed music teachers. You want to treat them with kindness and loving care and help them make it through to the end of December. The reputation of your school is in their hands.

Best wishes to you all for the holidays. ■

Questions for consideration in this column are welcome. Please address them to Dennis Theobald at [dennis.theobald@ata.ab.ca](mailto:dennis.theobald@ata.ab.ca).



# Protect your mental health during holiday season



## VIEWPOINTS

Canadian Mental Health Association

**H**oliday magic. Although it's real for some, the magic can also be a thin veneer, hiding challenging emotions that can come along with the celebrations. In fact, 52 per cent of Canadians report feelings of anxiety, depression and isolation during the holiday season. And, if you're already depressed or experiencing anxiety, the holidays can make things even worse.

Here are five ways that the holidays can be just too much and some tips to help preserve your peace of mind.

### 1. (Too) great expectations

The image of the "perfect holiday" permeates mainstream culture. We know exactly how it's supposed to go. We feel obligations. We compare ourselves to it.

Maybe the holidays aren't part of your cultural tradition, but you feel pressure to celebrate them. Or you feel excluded if you don't. If so,

- Ignore judgments of "bah humbug." You are not obliged to celebrate the holidays.
- Recognize if you feel oppressed by your own traditions. If you do, it's time to take the space and time to reinvent. Maybe that means saying no or setting other boundaries.
- Don't be ruled by what's gone on in the past. They're your holidays and you can take them back.
- Ask yourself what you love about the holidays. What do you dislike, or even hate? Now choose to do what you love!

### 2. Merriment to the max

Overeating. Overdrinking. Overspending. General overindulgence. It seems the holidays go hand and hand with them. This

compulsory consumerism and mandatory merriment can have a damaging effect on your mental health, especially if you struggle with your finances. Consumption comes at a price that not everyone can afford. If so,

- Know that you don't have to buy things to show others that you care.
- There are gift exchange ideas that cut down on consumerism, without skimping on generosity or giving.
- Stay on top of what you're spending by budgeting.
- Remind yourself of pitfalls or triggers when it comes to overindulging. Don't lose sight of your needs for exercise and sleep.

### 3. Your plate overfloweth

You may be hosting a gathering this year for the first (or 50th) time. Maybe you feel responsible for other people's entertainment and enjoyment. And maybe you feel like it's your job to please everyone and make sure others are having enough fun and enjoying their holidays, too. That's a lot of pressure. If so,

- Delegate: if you feel it's your job alone to make things perfect, you can ask others to help out.
- Take a break from hosting or retire altogether. Ask someone else to host this year.
- Head conflict off at the pass. If you know there are certain topics that will set people off, be kind and clear about boundaries and expectations.

### 4. Too much togetherness

Sometimes our holiday traditions are intensely social. Parties, get-togethers and family dinners can create relationship dynamics

that are rife with discomfort, and even conflict. Because our holiday traditions can date back to childhood, we may be called on to play roles we aren't comfortable playing any longer. If so,

- Remember that only you can choose what makes you happy.
- If you accept the invitation but find that you're feeling overwhelmed while you're there, plan to take time out by finding a quiet place to take a break, calling a friend or taking a walk.
- If you don't want to stay, you're allowed to leave.
- If you don't want to go, you don't have to. Give yourself permission to do what's best for you.

### 5. Feeling left out in the cold

More than one in 10 Canadians often or always feel lonely. And, in those who experience loneliness, half have poorer mental health overall. If you are already feeling isolated socially, or have a social or other anxiety disorder, being alone during the holidays can make things worse. If so,

- Do something special for yourself: cook yourself your favourite foods, go to a movie, do a holiday project.
- Volunteer. By helping others, you also boost your own mental health and have a chance to connect with other people. You can help out at a food bank, serve holiday dinner at a community meal or offer to get groceries or spend some time with someone who's alone and doesn't want to be.
- Reach out to others who are also looking for connection: there are whole groups of people—in person and online—who are also looking for community.
- Plan remote festivities: share photos, emails, videos over video calls. Set up a Zoom event or Facebook group.
- Go "old school" and write letters and holiday cards with invitations to connect by phone. ■

## YOUR VIEWS

### FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

**On the government's new regulation requiring schools that must move to online learning to simultaneously offer in-person learning.**

**Tayler Enseleit**

I actually had to do this during my first teaching day of my IFX practicum for a week. Half the class was isolated at home, half was in class with me.... sooooo bad.

**Michelle Renée**

Nothing this government decides makes any logical sense. Please explain how we are supposed to teach online and in person at the same time?!

**Mary Oxendale Spensley**

I taught both in the classroom and also online, but NEVER at the same time, because that would be chaos.

**Merissa Stemkowski**

There is no way teaching online and in person is appropriate. This government is delusional.

### TWITTER ON TWITTER

**one tired teacher @orabt**

If twitter goes down, where oh where will @AdrianaLaGrange make job layoff announcements, horrific curriculum changes or claims that masks are what caused learning disruptions and mental health issues in kids?

**Robert @FreeMyAlberta**

In one room of 27 I have eight refugees speaking four different languages, not English. Some have never been in a school before. Add this to the run-of-the-mill level difference from grade 3 to 7 and only a support worker one class a day and, well, let's say things are complex.

**Allison Scott Davies @AllisonYYC**

These days, living in Alberta is like living in an Orwell novel. Truthiness abounds... 🙄

**Alberta Teacher @TeachinAB**

Rural or urban, Alberta students are being hit hard. Cuts have stretched boards so thin, complex students are NOT getting the education they deserve. Parents have to fight for basically everything, and those are the parents who know how the system works. So many have no idea.

### On the ATA's Collective Bargaining Conference

**Kelly Murphy @klmurphy21**

A great two days at the @albertateachers Collective Bargaining Conference. I heard very useful and helpful information to aid me in my @NLATA15 president role. Thank you to the organizers and presenters.

**RD City ATA Local 60 @60Local**

"Don't believe what you want to believe until you know what you need to know." Words of wisdom shared at the Collective Bargaining Conference @albertateachers.

As student absenteeism continues...



### FOR THE RECORD

“As women we need to ensure that we are opening doors, keeping them open and helping others through.”

- Elissa Corsi, ATA staff officer and co-investigator of a new study entitled *Educational Leadership at the Intersection of Gender*.

# Leaves from work a barrier to leadership, study finds

Chris Sikkenga  
ATA News Staff

Women who take maternity and other leaves progress more slowly through the ranks of school leadership. This is one of the initial findings of a research project co-led by the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Aimed at examining the experiences of women in educational leadership roles in Alberta, the project found that women tend to be older than men when they are appointed to positions like assistant principal and principal. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is that women more frequently access various caregiving leaves such as maternity leave and parental care during the early stages of their careers.

"This definitely slowed down my career progression," said Elissa Corsi, an ATA staff officer who is the study's co-investigator.

Throughout her career, Corsi has worked as a teacher, department head, second language co-ordinator, assistant principal and principal. She took several caregiving leaves during the formative stages of her career, which delayed her entrance into school leadership.

"Many of my male counterparts had much more experience than I did, even though we had started teaching at the same time," she said.

The survey drew participation from a total of 401 school leaders, ranging from curriculum co-ordinators to superintendents, who answered anonymously. Sixty-eight per cent of the participants were women, 28 per cent were men and four per cent preferred not to say. Eighty per cent of the leaders surveyed were between the ages of 41 and 60; 82 per cent had children and 50 per cent had accessed maternity leave.



Elissa Corsi, study co-investigator

Some leaders reported that they'd chosen not to take full maternity or parental leave, either for family, financial or career-related reasons. An issue that the study highlighted is the fact that the time taken for maternity and parental leaves is not counted as pensionable service.

"As a young mom, I did not have the money to pay back the time I took in maternity or other leaves," Corsi said. "You have to pay it all at once and there was no way we could have pulled together that large of a sum. I will retire later because the leaves have impacted my retirement."

The study report represents stage one of an ongoing project. The next stage will engage several focus groups throughout the province in an effort to learn how to address the issues found in the survey. ■

## NOTABLE QUOTE

*"I don't think a leader is defined by a title. I believe as teachers we are all leaders in our schools and classrooms."*

— Elissa Corsi

## MORE INFORMATION

This study is a partnership between the University of Alberta, the Alberta Teachers' Association and the College of School Superintendents. Funding has been provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Details are available at <https://genderandleadership.ualberta.ca/>.



# Local bargaining needs teacher input

Cory Hare  
ATA News Managing Editor

Pay attention and participate. Those are the two keys for any teacher as local bargaining proceeds throughout the province, says Sean Brown, the ATA's associate co-ordinator of collective bargaining.

"People have to stay informed and engage in the process," Brown said.

Engagement means attending bargaining general meetings, paying attention to information provided by the Teacher Welfare Committee and providing the committee with a personal email address so they can quickly communicate bargaining-related information.

Brown noted that bargaining unit general meetings (known as BUGMs) don't have a quorum, so whoever attends makes the decision for the entire bargaining unit.

"If you want a say in what will happen

in your future, you need to show up," he said.

All 61 bargaining units are open for local bargaining. The process involves gathering teacher input through surveys and other means, creating an initial proposal for member approval, then proceeding with bargaining meetings.

About half of bargaining units are at the information gathering stage, whereas some have started actual bargaining.

While each local has its own issues, a common theme is re-establishing relationships and improving teachers' ability to participate in the decision-making that takes place at the division and school levels, Brown said.

A lot of remote decision-making took place during the pandemic, which eroded teachers' ability to participate to the level they've been used to, so many locals are looking to restore teacher voice through collaborative decision-making models such as liaison committees.

"There's a big focus on relationships at the local tables," Brown said. ■

# PD program area gets new associate co-ordinator

Chris Sikkenga  
ATA News Staff

Monique Gravel is the ATA's new associate co-ordinator of Professional Development. Gravel will be replacing Nancy Luyckfassel, who is the program area's new co-ordinator.

"I've had the great fortune of working with many great school and organizational leaders who have mentored me throughout my career," Gravel said.

"I'm excited about continuing the great work of the ATA and PD program area as we strive to provide programming and service to members that enhances their professional practice."

Gravel has worked as an executive staff officer in PD since 2013. There she provided bilingual support to teachers working to improve their professional practice. Additionally, Gravel helped create the Take Flight — Navigating Field Experience web resource for teachers, student teachers, school leaders and university facilitators that launched last year.

Gravel started volunteering for the organization at the beginning of her career in 1994. She's served as a



Monique Gravel, new associate co-ordinator

PD facilitator, economic consultant and an ATA representative on the French First Language Committee at the Canadian Teachers' Federation. She was a wellness program manager with Alberta Education in its French Language Services branch and was a practicum associate with Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta. She earned her MEd, BEd and BA degrees at the U of A. ■



## STORIES AND PHOTOS WANTED

If something newsworthy is going on in your school, district or local, please let us know. We will also consider articles, photos and cartoons. Please email tips and submissions to managing editor Cory Hare: [cory.hare@ata.ab.ca](mailto:cory.hare@ata.ab.ca).



Schools do not have the capacity to provide in-person learning alongside online delivery, says ATA president Jason Schilling.

ISTOCK

# New regulations present unworkable solutions

Cory Hare  
ATA News Managing Editor

The government's latest solution related to illness and school absenteeism is not a solution at all, said ATA president Jason Schilling.

On Nov. 24, Education Minister Adriana LaGrange announced a new regulation that requires school jurisdictions to provide in-person learning to students even if their school or school division has switched to online learning in response to sickness levels and absentee rates.

Schilling said the regulation imposes solutions that are simply unworkable.

"If schools have no choice but to implement online learning in response to severe staff shortages and limited availability of substitute teachers, they simply will not have sufficient capacity to offer in-person instruction at the same time, as is required by the regulation," he said.

Many schools across the province are struggling to maintain in-person teaching because of high numbers of teacher and student illnesses due to widespread outbreaks of COVID-19, influenza and RSV, he said.

In a letter to parents, LaGrange stated that the regulatory measures are necessary to ensure stability for students.

"Our teachers have worked hard to ensure students who may have fallen behind a grade level due to the instability in learning environments have the additional supports they need in the classroom. By protecting in-person learning, students will be provided with stability," she wrote.

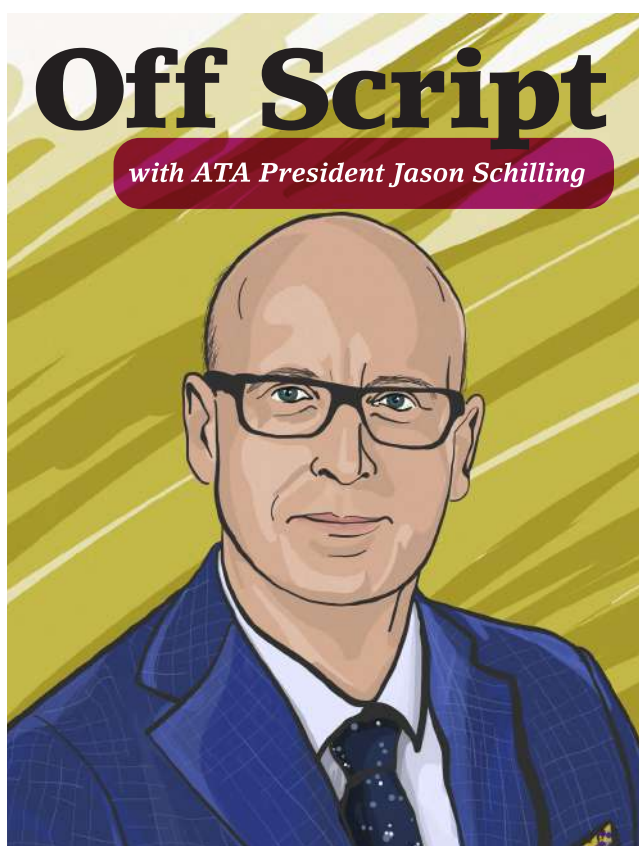
A new regulation also prevents school divisions from mandating the wearing of masks or denying students from receiving an in-person education due to their personal decision to wear or not wear a mask. The masking regulatory change does not apply to teachers and other school staff.

"Parents and students have told me time and time again that they want a normal school environment for their kids," said Premier Danielle Smith in a news release. "With that in mind, we have taken steps to protect and enhance educational choice. Families are free to make their own personal health decisions, and, no matter what that decision is, it will be supported by Alberta's education system."

The government also said that the chief medical officer of health can impose orders that supersede the limitations imposed by the regulations.

Schilling questioned whether the chief medical officer is truly able to act independently. Barring further action from the province's top doctor, Schilling suggested that local solutions would be more appropriate than sweeping regulations.

"Decisions concerning mask policy are best made by school authorities in response to local conditions and based upon credible medical advice," he said. ■



## Enjoy your break

One of the roles of the president is to represent the Association and teachers at a variety of events hosted by other education stakeholders such as school boards, university deans, community-based groups or our government. This representation is important as it allows the ATA to share teachers' and school leaders' concerns about their classrooms, students and public education.

Recently, I have been able to discuss the Stand for Education campaign with many of these groups, emphasizing that we all must work together to make education a top priority in the next provincial election. As you know, the ATA is hosting roundtable conversations about people's bold hopes for the future of public education. You can find more information about a provincial or local roundtable near you on the Stand for Education website or your local's website.

As part of this representation work, I was invited to attend the throne speech at the legislature on Nov. 29. Not only was it a good opportunity to meet MLAs and hear the direction government is intending to take, but I personally enjoy seeing the ceremony around the actual speech. This year, there was no mention

of education in this throne speech, which was not surprising to me as the new premier indicated her intentions for this fall sitting many times in the media.

Silence is not golden in this context. We cannot turn our attention away from what government intends for public education. We need to keep the advocacy pressure on, as you have heard me say before quoting Candy Palmater, "we don't need to be perfect, we just need to be persistent." Our collective persistence and collective advocacy will be needed in the next few months to make sure we do not see further erosion of what we value. I hope you can find ways in your busy lives to add your voices to the work of your local and provincial Association.

Speaking of busy lives, we are very close to the holiday break. This year has proven to be as challenging as the last few, and I know how hard teachers and school leaders have been working. My hope for you is rest, relaxation and time with friends and family. You work hard and deserve this upcoming break. Please take full advantage of this precious time. Be well and happy holidays. ■

**16 DAYS  
OF ACTIVISM  
AGAINST  
GENDER-BASED  
VIOLENCE**

**#16days**

Canada



*Begins Nov. 25*

# Alberta ranks last in education spending

ATA News Staff

If you were under the impression that Alberta is one of the country's biggest spenders when it comes to per-student education funding, you are not alone. The problem is, it's just not true.

A recent analysis of Statistics Canada data by ATA economist Neil Hepburn shows that Alberta actually ranks last in per-student spending when compared to other provinces.

Using the most recent data collected (2019/20), Statistics Canada looked at actual school board operating expenditures from the audited financial statements of every school board in the country. This showed that Alberta school boards' operating expenditures are \$10,896 per student. The lowest in Canada, this figure is \$1,200 less than the national average and \$3,136 less than Newfoundland, which sits at the top of the list.

These findings are in line with the findings of other researchers, such as the Fraser Institute, but are a contrast to the "big spending" message commonly disseminated by the Alberta government.

For example, the MacKinnon Report commissioned

by the UCP government shortly after its 2019 win put Alberta near the top of the list when it compared the province's per student funding to other provinces.

The problem with a straight comparison is that the structures used to fund public education can differ greatly from province to province, which can skew the numbers, Hepburn said. For example, Alberta Education's student funding may appear higher than other provinces' because the government includes the school tax dollars that were collected at the municipal level. Since our government includes these locally collected tax funds as part of their provincial education budget, it's difficult to determine how much of their announced funding actually comes from the provincial coffers. Other provinces may have an entirely different funding structure that does not include other sources.

Statistics Canada provides a more accurate breakdown of public education funding, Hepburn said.

## Board issue

The latest figures highlight a shift that's taken place over the last two decades. Alberta was fourth in the country in 2000/01 and reached number two in

2010/11 before starting to decline — falling to tenth in 2019/20.

This drop in public education spending is exacerbated by the underspending of some school boards when it comes to budgeting.

While some school boards are forced to operate with a chronic deficit, many are able to strike an even balance between surpluses and deficits. There are those, however, who repeatedly run surpluses and bank the excess funds. The Alberta government has identified this as a habitual process for several school boards and has taken steps to remedy it. Starting in the fall of 2023, the government will begin clawing back some of the excess reserves being held by the boards.

Alberta Teachers' Association president Jason Schilling says the school boards and the government need to address the problems that continually plague our classrooms.

"I find it extremely disappointing — and quite frustrating — to look at this data and know that there are so many areas when that money could make a difference in our schools," Schilling said. "Class size has been a persistent problem for public education. To see money going into the bank rather than making a difference in our student's lives is unacceptable." ■

## Per student operating expenditures 2019/20

Rank	GEO	Per student
	CANADA	\$12,105
1	Newfoundland & Labrador	\$14,033
2	Québec	\$13,546
3	Nova Scotia	\$12,847
4	Manitoba	\$12,744
5	Prince Edward Island	\$12,373
6	Ontario	\$11,887
7	British Columbia	\$11,725
8	New Brunswick	\$11,364
9	Saskatchewan	\$11,247
10	Alberta	\$10,896

\* The per student amount for Canada excludes Yukon, NWT and Nunavut.

Source: Statistics Canada, table 37-10-0065-01 and 37-10-0109-01

## Connect with your students but don't touch them



### PITFALLS & PRECAUTIONS

**Chris Gibbon**  
ATA Secretary to Professional  
Conduct Committees

*Pitfalls and Precautions is a series that aims to educate teachers on professional conduct issues by highlighting situations addressed by the ATA Professional Conduct Committee.*

You are trying to show a student how to do a manoeuvre in physical education class and, in doing so, you use your hand to guide their back. You are trying to teach a student how to play a musical instrument and you place their fingers properly on the keyboard, stringed instrument or valve. You guide a student to the hall by placing your hand on their shoulder. You console a crying student by giving them a hug. All these seemingly well-intentioned acts of instruction, direction or compassion have unfortunately resulted in some teachers being called to account for their actions.

Teacher work is unique. Teachers and school leaders spend copious amounts of time building relationships with students, in some cases even more than the student's own parents, as the teacher instructs, coaches, guides and mentors. Yet teachers must always be cognizant of the fact that they are, in fact, not the parent. In the age of #me too and #I believe you, teachers who find themselves on the receiving end of a student or parent complaint may find that an innocent expression of care or compassion or, as described above, an innocent guiding hand, results in allegations requiring investigation, where the teacher's motives are unexpectedly brought into question.

These are difficult waters to navigate. After all, teachers often bring a wealth of experience working with young people; many are parents themselves and they understand the power of a gentle touch or guiding hand. Yet, who wants to experience the stress of an employer-instigated investigation, possibly being placed off work in the interim and isolated from students and colleagues? Unfortunately, this can be and has been the reality for some teachers who find themselves the subject of even spurious allegations.

Whereas employers have an obligation to properly vet complaints and to act with prudence and good judgment in deciding how to proceed in the face of a complaint, teachers can sometimes find themselves

caught in limbo in the absence of the aforementioned.

How to stay safe? There is no fail-safe way to avoid allegations that are vexatious or unfounded. In a polite turn on the vernacular, complaints happen. Still, there are actions teachers can take to protect themselves. Avoiding any kind of physical contact with students is, of course, the safest approach. Those who scoff at the idea of a virtual hug will protest that human touch is part of building relationships with others. Others will ask what could possibly be wrong with an innocent redirection to a student or a properly placed hand to demonstrate proper execution of an important skill?

Asking for permission where contact seems necessary, avoiding being alone with a student, keeping doors and blinds open, demonstrating care and concern with a listening and sympathetic ear, and avoiding any physical contact when angry are all strategies that teachers can employ to try to stay safe.

Despite all your efforts, if you find yourself on the receiving end of a complaint, you should seek advice from a Teacher Employment Services staff officer as soon as possible. We can assist in making sure that you are treated fairly, that you have an opportunity to provide a complete response and that relevant contextual variables that you identify are considered. ■



The management and staff of Morgex Insurance would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to Alberta Teachers for your dedication to our children's education.

Wishing you all the best for the holiday season and happiness for the new year.

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Meet our Senior Leadership Team representative in person in Edmonton / Calgary, 22<sup>nd</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

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Update your online ATA account between November 14 and December 16 for a chance to win one of three \$1000 cash prizes!

Visit [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) to login to your ATA account and update your contact information.

The Alberta Teachers' Association

COMM-256-1 2022-27

Have a wonderful holiday season, from everyone at ATRF.

We will be closed on December 24th and will reopen on January 3rd.

See you all in the new year!

Visit: [ATRF.com](http://ATRF.com)

ATRF Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

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# TALENT

December 6, 2022 | Volume 57, Number 6

## What are you doing over the holiday break?

### FACEBOOK POLL

83 respondents



Absolutely nothing  
39%



Visting family and friends  
25%



Taking a trip  
16%



Self-care  
13%



Working  
6%



Other  
1%

I hope all of our teachers take a break and energize.

Tom Yohemas

Wait... there's a holiday coming up ???

Melissa Houston Petruk

Nothing but self-care and hanging out with my mom and a few coffee dates with friends... home sweet home.



Kamal Johal